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Attention: Recalculating!

"Magic is the bastard sister of science"(James George Frazer)

While technology becomes our mirror, environment, and almost key factor in the relationship between people, the question I ask is whether we can extrapolate from the promise of technology the mechanisms that remind us of our human limitations. This project aims to show how mechanisms of magical thinking are strongly tied to the same paradigm of technology that based its development on annihilating any affiliations to these mechanisms. Through manipulating GPS navigation devices, the project will illustrate how these questions relate to our belief systems, everyday uses and conceptions of technology. I want to focus on the ideas of and approaches to interfaces, how are they designed and conceptualized, creating a tool that doesn't necessarily have to be functional, but will underlie the physicality and hierarchies of abstraction that unveil the subtle distribution of power.

Magical thinking can be seen as an empowering strategy, a way for man to confront nature. It is connected to the physical world and to the imaginative world at the same time in a direct relation,

and a way of organizing a social structure. It can be understood as a principle of giving events and appearances a causal relation and an important element of the ambiguous relationship between man and "machine". I will ground my understanding of magical thinking through the ideas of several authors: Weber's definition of charismatic objects in animism, Frazer's homeopathic, and contagious magic (by Jacobson metaphor and metonymy), Malinovski's contribution to the power of language and possibility of words to directly affect the world (Cunningham, 1999). Magical thinking is in the context of this project applied as a social approach in the process of naturalizing technology, through language and conceptualization. In other words, as Katherine Hayles notes "We become the codes we punch" (Hayles, 1999, p.89).

With language as a basis, applications of magical thinking exist through different forms of language: performative human language (Malinovski), mediated language, and code- as executable language, encryption and physicality of our ICT (information communication technology) devices. The different levels of languages that exist in the encounter with technology allow the combination of both homeopathic and contagious magic to happen, the first one relating to the image, myth of technology, the second to the uses of technology. Code is therefore understood as a bridge, a space for possibility, manipulation and control, both in commercial and artistic sense. While, as technology develops, and users understand less about the technology behind the devices they use, the imaginative, mythic space grows.

Seeing is still not believing

The new Ipod touch, with a visual enhancing Retina display.

While working on a former project where I created an audio guide to walk through a collection of buildings appropriated as public sculptures by a fake institution, the audio walk opened up questions of possibilities of navigating through physical space inscribed with meaning. How does technological dependency influence our perception of space, orientation, and how much does our perception rely on these technologies?

The theoretical wrier Eric Kluitenberg nicely remarks that new technology comes as *deus ex machina* (Kluitenberg, 2006). The GPS navigational system is emblematic of the function of magical thinking in technology in many ways. The software usually used literally talks to us and leads us from point A to point B. It exemplifies the naturalized dependency on technology, the ease of relying on it, and the trust in the accuracy and consistency of the device that leads us. The ways we connect to technological interfaces allow us to be always on, updated, metaphorically and physically. In that way they become charismatic objects.

An interface has limitations in the way that it is manufactured, and by the software it runs. Staying within these limitations of the software on a GPS navigational device, I will manipulate the software to change the referential system used, in order to render visible the classical referential system. The purpose is to make minor changes, that could even remain unnoticed, showing how much we "believe" and how soft control is realized through technology, making us adapt almost invisibly. Even if the GPS software takes the longest, instead of the shortest way, it has changed the original intention behind it. This has a different role than the Situationist walks through cities, because those walks were the artistic attitude of a *ludic* citizen. Interventions in the case of a GPS device are that of how the software determines the referential system, while the person using it doesn't have to be aware of this intervention. Building upon Slavoj Žižek's understanding of virtual reality as the reality of he virtual (Žižek, 2004), the image can sometimes be more real than the actual reality. Here, the belief in the technology itself is similar to how I approached two different former projects: in one case it was building the image of the public sculptures, and in another, the image of the H1N1 virus.

In the project "The us in virus" concerning issues of decentralized networks, online participatory media and paranoia surrounding viruses were analyzed through their symbiosis. This relation between language, code, community and physicality was realized through literally tagging objects in public space considered as nodes of these networks, making an abstract set of issues physical, concrete. Stickers tracing contagious physical networks in a pubic toilet and news stand (text: "H1N1 helps you share and connect with the people in your life")

The use of the GPS device is particularly interesting as an extreme example of the ambivalent relation between technology and magical thinking. Because of its technological basis, communicating with satellites to get directions becomes a favorable activity, which would, without the technology, probably be rejected as superstition.

What I would like to show through this subject is the idea that technology is strongly tied to myth and magical thinking, that with the rise of technology also the strategies of enhancing, immersing, control increase. They increase through the process of naturalization and through the levels of

abstraction (be it metaphoric language or abstraction through the applications of interfaces and code). I will research various approaches to interfaces, history of technological determinism and its relation to magical thinking. In technical terms, I will start the research on the possibilities of different software to use and getting familiar with it.

The end result will most probably consist of the illustration of the referential systems used (the classical GPS navigation system and the manipulations of it, showing them as different equally valid referential systems), the documentation of uses of the manipulated GPS device and the actual device as an artifact.

Work and approaches that deal with some of the issues or methods mentioned above:

Johannes P Osterhoff made a work that deals with the space of advertising and technology as space of myth by contaminating the image of the Ipad, advertised, among other beneficial features, to bring freedom from porn.   http://www.johannes-p-osterhoff.com/interface-art/freedom-from-porn

The Yes men   http://theyesmen.org/

PS world, by Julian Oliver   http://selectparks.net/~julian/psworld/

Endo-Verena Friedrich   http://www.heavythinking.org/content/view/30/37/

Embodying useless computational activity in a literal black box

ELIZA--A Computer Program For the Study of Natural Language Communication Between Man and Machine- Joseph Weizenbaum   http://i5.nyu.edu/~mm64/x52.9265/january1966.html

Crucifix NG, tech-enchanted faith, Eliot Malkin   http://www.neural.it/nnews/crucifix_ng_e.htm

Images:

http://www.apple.com/ipodtouch/features/retina-display.html)

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